

What's best for the children

Seems like the debate every year over education funding turns on the emotional argument of "what's best for the children." This year, it seems to me, all of us can buy into the "what's best" argument if we only do a little personal soul-searching.

What's best for the children is a consistent, reliable source of funding for K-12 public education that does not punish community colleges or universities.

What's best for the children is to give them some relief from the political chess game that's played every four years as elections come around; they are not pawns.

What's best for the children is having a great teacher in the classroom who makes as much money as we can possibly afford to pay.

What's best for the children are periods of physical activity during the school day and a curriculum that highlights better nutrition and a healthier lifestyle.

What's best for the children are the latest textbooks.

What's best for the children is a program to reduce the horrible drop out rate, including alternative courses of study leading to jobs that don't require a college education.

What's best for the children is a stable, safe school environment that builds on a stable, safe home environment.

What's best for the children are school districts that have sufficient, not overly large, numbers of administrators because every dollar spent to pay a paper pusher is a dollar not available to spend in the classroom.

In other words, what's best for the children is a modern yet flexible educational system that serves their interests. As we know from experience, that system doesn't exist today, and to develop one will take us all moving together one step at a time.

That's why I support the new law that phases in funding for the Mississippi Adequate Education Program; it is the first law that gives a real plan on how to reach the elusive goal of "fully funding" K-12 education.

I support the funding proposals put forward by Governor Haley Barbour, under whose administration state support for K-12 will have increased by more than \$480 million since 2004, or more than 24 percent. This school year, per student spending in Mississippi's public schools from federal, state, and local sources is estimated to be between \$7,600 and \$7,800 and since Governor Barbour took office state support for K-12 school districts through the Mississippi Adequate Education Program has increased \$323 million, or 19 percent.

I support putting \$65 million into MAEP this year and each year for the next three years and then keeping the funding at an adequate level.

I support an end to the rhetorical lashing that comes up every year as various political interests choose sides.

I support keeping the focus on new ideas that help students learn and, in turn, that help them succeed in their lives and careers. As responsible adults and parents, that's the least we should do.

That's what's best for the children.

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How much is enough

When I read about the debate over so-called full funding of something called the Mississippi Adequate Education Program, I am really confused because I know there are lies, damn lies and statistics. I'm with Governor Haley Barbour when he says more money has been or will be spent on public education during his term than the four-year term of any Governor in our state's history.

His own budget for fiscal year 2008 calls for spending more than \$3.4 billion, or nearly 63 percent of the State of Mississippi's general fund budget, on education. Most of that money will go to K-12, much of it as I understand it under the MAEP formula.

A lot of people in my neighborhood are beginning to ask, how much is enough?

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Let's see

Let's see, now, with the increased spending proposed for K-12 public schools by Governor Barbour, state support for K-12 will have increased by more than \$480 million since 2004, an increase of more than 24 percent. This school year, per student spending in Mississippi's public schools from federal, state, and local sources is estimated to be between \$7,600 and \$7,800 and since Governor Barbour took office state support for K-12 school districts through the Mississippi Adequate Education Program has increased \$323 million, or 19 percent.

In view of these historically high numbers, how can anyone legitimately suggest that our Governor isn't fully committed to improving public education?

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## Education more than MAEP

Some of our state's politicians, particularly people like Rep. Cecil Brown of Jackson, are so soft on parts of education beyond the precious formula of the Mississippi Adequate Education Program that you have to wonder if they really care about giving teachers a 3% across-the-board pay raise, or trying to reduce the horrible drop out rate, or adequately funding community colleges and institutions of higher learning.

Mr. Brown has conveniently forgotten he co-authored legislation that provided a phase-in approach to fully funding MAEP, which became state law when the governor signed it earlier this year. Mr. Brown and the House's obstructionist leadership have adopted a "scorched earth" policy by demanding a vote on education funding before any of the other needs of state government are funded. And, this at a time when state support for K-12 school districts through the Mississippi Adequate Education Program has increased \$323 million, or 19 percent.

I think the phase-in idea is good and the Legislature should stick to what they voted on.